Mobile training

By Eric Wilson
December 14, 2004
Next

Soon it may be possible to learn wherever you are, whenever you are there. In the same way the cellular phone untethered us from the work desk, there may soon be no need to burden your back carrying scores of hefty training manuals if mobile training kicks off.

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework's New Practices project is investigating a way to provide training as it is needed in the field, so-called "m-training".

Marcus Ragus, a project officer at the Tasmanian Institute of TAFE, has successfully used mobile devices in the field to deliver just-in-time training at the Royal Botanic Gardens in his state. Personal digital assistants (PDAs) in the form of Pocket PCs were used for conventional e-learning - consisting of pictures, text, audio and video - adapted to suit the learner's location as indicated by markers on the ground.

Meanwhile, Alex Hayes, an education research officer at Swan TAFE in Western Australia, experimented with live Short Message Service (SMS) text mentoring of disengaged youth, using mobile phones.

Both Ragus and Hayes reported their success as being only the tip of the iceberg in mobile just-in-time workplace training.

SMS messages have been used in education only to badger students to return overdue library books or inform on them to their parents. But Hayes decided to test the technology as a positive reinforcement tool on 60 students at risk of dropping out of education.

"The nature of the project was to retain, engage and motivate young people," Hayes says. "It could be anything from URLs to fostering teamwork to bringing social groups together. We are turning them from disengaged to highly engaged students."

Being a native technology in today's youth culture, SMS was not considered by students to be mere pager broadcasts; for they immediately SMSed back what they thought, providing teachers with live insights into the dynamics of how things were going.

"I picked up a lot of knowledge from the young people," Hayes says. "We grouped them by their responses."

If the success of this first-generation technology is a guide, it looks like on-the-job mobile mentoring could help workers improve their skills if the cost of wireless broadband was cheaper.

"The building industry is the first to be interested in mentor learning via video-conferencing, particularly with retired tradesmen," Hayes says. "They have a big skills gap with high attrition ratios."

Ragus adds: "One area we looked at was plug-in cameras. What we investigated was the potential of using these devices by the workplace assessor in an evidence recording operation. We are only scratching the surface."

Related

- React to this article
- Submit a news tip